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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001676

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR KS KN
SUBJECT: KEY NA COMMITTEES LIKELY COOPERATIVE

Classified By: POL Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Grand National Party (GNP) now controls both the Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification Committee and the National Defense Committee -- good news for U.S.-relevant legislation. In addition to the chairs, the committees are stacked with other pro-U.S. lawmakers, though the progressive Democratic Party (DP) members on the committees could mount significant opposition to more controversial bills. The committee nomination process showed that the GNP is still gun shy from this summer's beef protest -- a factor in display as the DP exerted undue influence over the committee formation process. Nevertheless, close allies in key positions bodes well for U.S. interests in Korea. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In a break with past practice, three of the GNP's 11 committee chairs -- including the Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification Committee (FATU) -- were decided by vote. The GNP leadership originally nominated all 11 chairman candidates, but decided to hold elections for three positions after lawmakers protested the nominations and announced their desire for consideration. Park Jin, Kwon Young-se, and Choung Byoung-gug announced they would run for chairs of FATU, the Intelligence Committee, and the Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee, respectively. The lawmakers criticized the party's top-down nomination style demanding that the selection be merit-based. In a vote of 156 GNP lawmakers, Park Jin won the chairmanship of the foreign affairs committee, but Kwon and Choung were both defeated in favor of the leadership's choice candidates. The eight chairs that were uncontested were endorsed by unanimous vote. While this appears to be a victory for Park, Assembly sources note that the GNP leadership is furious with Park and this may not have been the best long term move for the ambitious Oxford grad and former diplomat.

Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification

¶3. (SBU) The Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification Committee (recently renamed so that "Unification" is listed last instead of first) is one of the two most highly-sought after committees in the National Assembly. The 29 members have yet to be decided, but those seeking membership include high-profile GNP members Lee Sang-deuk and U.S. educated Chung Mong-joon along with former Defense Attaché in Washington, Hwang Jin-ha. Additionally, Kwon Young-se, a third-term lawmaker and Harvard alum, is also hoping to join the committee. Other possible GNP members include former floor leader Ahn Sang-su, Park Geun-hye confidant Gu

Sang-chan, Lee Yoon-sung, fourth termer Chung Ui-hwa, and Jeon Jae-hee. Also on the conservative's side, Liberty Forward Party chief and erstwhile presidential candidate Lee Hoi-chang also reportedly hopes to join the committee.

¶4. (SBU) For the Democratic Party, former Foreign Minister Song Min-soon is on the potentials list, as are Former Minister of Justice Chun Jung-bae and fellow four-term lawmaker Chung Se-kyun. Another former Justice Minister Park Sang-cheon, former Uri Party leader and current Vice Speaker Moon Hee-sang, and former Justice Minister Kim Jong-yul are also reportedly vying for DP slots on the committee.

National Defense Committee

¶5. (C) The smaller National Defense Committee -- with 18 members - will be chaired by GNP member Kim Hak-song. Kim is not a defense specialist but is known in the Assembly for his ability to follow marching orders from above, a trait that endeared him to President Lee during the 2007 campaign. He will likely prove a good partner and deal well with the Blue House. Other senior lawmakers interested in joining include GNP Floor Leader Hong Joon-pyo, four-term lawmaker Kim Moo-sung, and three-term lawmaker and Oxford graduate Yim Tae-hee. Kim Jang-soo, a former Minister of National Defense, will also likely find a spot on the GNP's list, along with Park Geun-hye advisor Yoo Seong-min, who earned his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Wisconsin. Other contenders include Kim Dong-sung, Kim Sung-hoi, Kim Young-woo, a former journalist who ran the policy team of President Lee's think tank GSI for several years. Kim Hok-lee and Kim Hyo-jae are also pushing for a space on the committee. Conservative lawmaker Song Young-sun (Ph.D. from University of Hawaii) of the Pro-Park Alliance is also a likely defense committee member as the only woman with a background on defense issues. Unfortunately, she is a testy counterpart who frequently physically assaulted Lee Myung-bak supporters during primary rallies, when she was a fervent Park Geun-hye backer.

¶6. (SBU) Democratic Party hopefuls for the defense committee include party heavyweights Park Sang-cheon -- a five-term lawmaker and former Minister of Justice -- Moon Hee-sang, and Chung Se-kyun, who studied at Pepperdine University.

Comment

¶7. (C) The current National Assembly schedule calls for the committee assignments to be finalized next week. Thereafter, in early September, a new Assembly session will convene, which should pass some of the more urgent domestic legislation. The committee lists are tentative and subject to change, but overall, the GNP dominance -- especially in the FATU committee -- bodes well for U.S.-relevant legislation. The relatively high number of lawmakers with some U.S. connection is even better. Nonetheless, the difficulty the GNP has had in dealing with the DP is unlikely to go away.

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